



16 June 2022, Ramallah - On Saturday 18 June, the Palestinian Ministry of Health will launch round two of a polio vaccination campaign targeting all children under age five in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. This is a supplementary immunization campaign designed to give children under age five an extra dose of protection from poliovirus, on top of their regularly scheduled vaccinations.

Vaccination, using bivalent oral polio vaccine (bOPV), is free and will be offered at maternal and child centres and UNRWA centres throughout Bethlehem and Jerusalem between Saturday 18 June and Tuesday 21 June.

Palestine has been polio-free for more than 25 years, thanks to a robust routine immunization programme and a strong culture of vaccine acceptance. But the regional risk of poliovirus is increasing. Following the detection of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 3 (cVDPV3) in sewage outflow in Wadi Alnar site, where there is a junction between wastewater coming from inside the green line with wastewater coming from Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the Ministry of Health took the decision to launch two rounds of a preventative vaccination campaign to boost children's immunity in the two areas deemed most at risk: Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

"All children under age five, regardless of their immunization status, can benefit from an extra layer of protection against poliovirus. There is no fixed number of times a child should be vaccinated with oral polio vaccine: each dose gives additional protection, on top of the regularly scheduled polio vaccination. I strongly encourage every parent to make it a priority to vaccinate their children in round two of this campaign, even if they missed round one – both for their sake, and for Palestine," said Dr Mai al-Kaila, Minister of Health, Palestine.

The vaccination campaign is being carried out with support from WHO, UNICEF and UNRWA's Palestine country offices.

"Keeping Palestine polio-free is a top priority for WHO and its partners. We are supporting the Ministry of Health to ensure that all children under age five have an opportunity to get an extra dose of protection against poliovirus. I urge all parents to bring their children for vaccination during this campaign and to keep their routine vaccinations up to date to protect them from all vaccine-preventable diseases," said WHO occupied Palestinian territory Representative Dr Rik Peepkorn.

“Every child has a right to a life free from polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases. To eliminate polio, every child in every household must be vaccinated. UNICEF remains committed to supporting the Palestinian Ministry of Health to reach all children. Everyone must play a role in keeping Palestine free of this debilitating disease,” said UNICEF’s Special Representative to the State of Palestine Lucia Elmi.

Round two starts on a Saturday to make it easier for working parents to get their under-fives to health centres for vaccination. As with round one, parents do not need to bring children’s vaccination records to clinics, but if they do, those records will be updated.

Children living outside of Jerusalem and Bethlehem do not currently require an additional dose of oral polio vaccine. If their routine immunizations are up to date, they are well protected from poliovirus and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

The vaccination campaign in Palestine is part of the global effort to eradicate poliovirus, spearheaded by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

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